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OUR NEW BUILDING:

The Epworth League.

BY

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REV. JOHN E. HARRISON,
A Member of the Epworth League Board.

WITH INTRODUCTION BY

REV. W. W. PINSON,
Of the West Texas Conference.

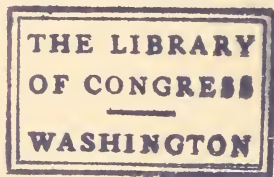


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To My Mother,
WHO CARED FOR ME IN INFANCY, TRAINED ME IN
BOYHOOD, AND LIVES TO ENCOURAGE
ME IN MANHOOD,
I DEDICATE THIS LITTLE VOLUME.
(2)



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PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION.

"OUR NEW BUILDING" has received commendatory notices from quite a number of our Church papers and from some of our leading men.

The reception accorded it and the kind words from readers of it encourage the author to believe that this little book may be blessed of God in helping to found the Epworth League of the M. E. Church, South, on those essential doctrines and principles of the Bible, the preaching and practicing of which gave rise to Methodism.

The book was born of a desire to see our young people build aright and upon the sure foundation, and this edition is sent forth with a prayer that it may accomplish something for the glory of God and the vigorous and spiritual growth of the Epworth League.

INTRODUCTION.

“O THAT mine adversary had written a book!” But my friend has written a book. What then? Why, write an introduction, of course. The reader may skip it, as readers generally do, but write I must. For do I not remember the halcyon days when the author and I struggled amid the bewildering mazes of the Greek verb, wrote first-rate poetry of which the world was not aware, and tried the temper of our maiden swords in glorious debate?

If he had written a dull book, I should have read it for the author's sake; as it is, I shall read it and ask others to read it for its own sake. Given a good writer, a good reason for writing, and a good subject, the result cannot be less than a good book. We have here the outcome of this happy combination.

The Epworth League has in it the germs of wondrous possibilities. The nature and variety of its methods fit the fancy of the young. It has already laid hold on the latent and hitherto neglected strength and enthusiasm of the young life of the Church with a success clearly prophetic of the development yet to be. It promises a class of trained workers for the Church of the future as superior to

the untrained as the veteran soldier is to the raw recruit.

But it promises to be no less valuable as a restraining and disciplinary influence than as a training school. It has come to us at a time when the Church is finding it increasingly difficult to keep her young people from entering forbidden paths. The influence of worldly associations and the attractions of a vicious literature have been hard to withstand. Hard because, perhaps, our efforts have been mainly negative. We have relied on "thou shalt not." We forgot it is easier to turn a stream than to dam it, to switch an engine than to block its way. The Epworth League has cut new channels for the fiery energies of our youth. It is destined to rob the ballroom and card table of their charm by furnishing a higher style of enjoyment. It will counteract the influence of worldly associations by furnishing a higher and holier basis of fellowship. It will break the spell of vicious literature by opening to the curious and hungry mind the pages of a noble and ennobling literature.

Perhaps our religious training has been too much after the fashion of old time medical practice. The doctors, we younger ones are told, used to value their remedies largely by their distastefulness. They even put burnt bread crust or some bitter bark in God's pure water that it might not taste good to the patient. Have we not in spiritual things proceeded on the hypothesis that, since holy

things must be distasteful to the carnal mind, therefore the more we can make the offices of religion a crucifixion to the flesh the more surely we meet the needs of the case? I have found no other theory to account for some prayer meetings.

The Epworth League has come to teach us—or perhaps it has come because we had already learned—that spiritual things are not more effective by being made distasteful. Who ever thought a child would more readily find God in nature if all the flowers were black, the streams sunless and silent, and the birds sang ever in a minor key? May we not hope to find one day how he who took the little ones in his arms can fill and thrill young life at every stage with spontaneous and healthy love of what is holiest and best the same as with a love of beauty in nature? Perhaps, when we know him better.

At least we do not believe worship is less real because the surroundings are not suggestive of inquisitorial tortures, nor that a sermon is more saving because it happens to be dull, nor that a song is less akin to angelic choruses because it rises and swells with jubilant pulse of glad young hearts. To adjust our religious machinery to the young is a hard lesson, yet it must be learned. Not that the standard should be lowered. No a thousand times. But to oil the wheels and adjust the harness comfortably to the draft horse is suggested not only by the law of kindness, but by economy of oats as well.

One of the needs the Epworth League has discovered is that of a literature suited to its members; a literature more serious and lofty than the average Sunday school story and less didactic and weighty than the average theological treatise; a literature shot through with the holiest thoughts and noblest aspirations of our holy religion and withal broadly and bravely denominational.

"Our New Building" is a contribution to this need. The author is a young man, not far enough from his own youth to have quite forgotten what would have pleased and helped him in that nascent and restless period. He has chosen wisely and treated well his subject. He has steered clear of sensationalism and mere sentimentality. There is an encouraging solidity about the title, and the table of contents proves that the author keeps faith with us throughout. He has not written simply to entertain, but to help the building. May the book be read, pondered, and practiced by thousands!

W. W. PINSON.


San Antonio, Tex., March 9, 1894.

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I.

BUILDING.

 NEW building has been in process of erection in our Church for the past three years, and our young people, singing and rejoicing as they laid stone upon stone in the rapidly rising wall, have been the happy builders.

Permission was granted four years ago by the fathers in council assembled, for the formulation of a plan of work by which the edifice might be enterprised; and so soon as that plan was announced, all over the Southland eager and consecrated young people heartily joined together to begin work on the new building.

The gladness and readiness of spirit with which the young people responded to the opportunity make plain the facts that they felt the need of some definite line of work in the Church and that at heart they were willing to do their part in building up the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

All things considered, the development of the Epworth League work in our Church has been remarkable.

It has not partaken of ephemeral growth, like a mushroom, to spring up in a night and perish in a day, but from the first in its progress as a movement of Christian effort has manifested a solidity and strength prophetic of its future power.

There are no signs of spasmodic or short-lived activity that busily works until the novelty wears away, then leaves the incomplete and deserted walls to excite in all beholders a contempt for such lack of sincerity and steadfastness. A number of Leagues, we admit, after organizing hopefully, have very soon perished for the lack of interest; but the general development seems to have been such that as a rule the young people have gathered strength and interest as they gained experience and knowledge of League work. And now, since the proposed building has been approved and the workers have been organized and authorized to complete the promising structure under the

authority and by the aid of our beloved Church, we may with increased zeal and confidence take up the work anew and endeavor to make this the most wonderful movement of the Church in the closing decade of the nineteenth century.

We rejoice in the workers and in the excellent work already done, and so pleased are we that it is earnestly desired to see the whole structure finished in the very best possible manner. In erecting a building, however, especially if it be a large one, that is a profitable use of time which is spent in judicious consultation. Therefore we call the builders to pause long enough from work to join in a friendly talk about the

things pertaining to this interesting structure. As in the erection of material buildings regard is to be had for the principles of architecture, much more so in spiritual edifices are the appropriate and governing principles to be given due consideration by the builders.

Wherefore, without assuming over you superiority of knowledge or a more intense interest in the Epworth League, we have felt moved, in an unpretentious way, to call the attention of the workers to some things of importance connected with this building. So vital to the interests of Methodism is this work in which you are now engaged, that it would characterize stolid indifference con-

cerning its welfare to be careless of the building now going up, or of the foundation upon which it is being erected. You are well aware that the higher the walls reach, and the nearer completion the building grows, the more disastrous would be the collapse if any fundamental principle of building should be ignored. We are not looking for a collapse of this work; we prophesy good concerning it, and in order to help make our prophecy a realization, we propose to scrutinize the work as it progresses.

We therefore ask you to consider with us awhile the first essential to stability and permanency of buildings. This we shall allot to another chapter.

II.

A GOOD FOUNDATION ESSENTIAL.

THE Son of God—the son of Mary —who spake as never man spake, emphasized in the Sermon on the Mount the importance of a solid foundation to support a building. We all know that though a man build well, though he erect a commodious and substantial house, yet if he is so thoughtless as to neglect securing for it a solid foundation, the whole edifice is liable to a complete collapse. And this direful catastrophe might be due solely to the fact that the foundation was not duly considered. If the foundation be washed from under

a building, the ruin will be in proportion to the massiveness of the structure. This great building, the Epworth League, which you are now erecting, if founded on the sand, when you have brought it to a happy completion and while you are crying, "Grace, grace unto it!" would, if struck by the floods, in its mighty fall bring harm to our Zion.

The importance of having a strong and secure foundation is seen in the fact that when God would build his Church in the world, he used four thousand years of the earth's history in laying the foundation stones of his spiritual kingdom among men. Thus the Lord laid an immovable and adamant foundation in the apostles

and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone. The Church built upon it must stand the flood tide of evil; but being supported by such a base, the gates of hell may assault in vain, because it rests on the impregnable rock. Then we think it is a pertinent and timely query which we here raise—namely, Is the foundation sufficient? You are building a Christian structure after the plan of Methodist architecture. The foundation must be good all around the great circumference. So we would call to each section of workers and to each individual worker to know whether the foundation is solid and broad enough for the building. But you may ask:

“How shall we know whether the foundation is sufficient? What constitutes a sufficiency?” This we shall be glad to answer; but in order to do so to the satisfaction and instruction of all it will be necessary for us to consider in the next few chapters some matters of history which will throw light upon the subject and in all probability enable us to see eye to eye on this important question.

We ask you then to go back with us to the year of our Lord 1729, and let us enter Oxford University, England, and there find the first young people's movement of modern times.

III.

A YOUNG PEOPLE'S MOVEMENT THE HARBINGER OF METHODISM.

UPON investigation we find that the great spiritual force denominated Methodism did not spring into existence unannounced, or enter upon its world-wide career without a forerunner to prepare the way for its coming. We find that ten years before Methodism properly became a revival power in England there was organized at Oxford University, by several students, among whom were John and Charles Wesley, a young men's league for the purpose of studying systematically the New

Testament in Greek, and of seeking a better life and assisting each other to attain it. Very soon there was added to their study and prayer another then unpopular but very important department: that of charity and help. As they prayed and read and talked in the privacy of their room, their hearts went out to others, and especially to the unfortunate and suffering. So a natural outcome of it was a regular visitation to the sick, the needy, and the imprisoned for the purpose of ministering to their temporal and spiritual wants.

These young men who formed this league had not been converted—that is, had not a conscious salvation, though they were all members of

the Church of England, and had been brought up in the orthodox faith. They were intellectually and experimentally ignorant of the deep spirituality of the New Testament, their lives having come under the influence then prevailing, which, having lost the power of the gospel in its letter, magnified intellectual orthodoxy to the almost total obscuration of the deeper teachings of the Scriptures concerning personal salvation. So that these students who were strangers to the power of spiritual regeneration—the being made new creatures in Christ Jesus—not having a consciousness of sins forgiven, were being led by the Holy Spirit in the formation of that first

young people's league of modern times, and in following the guidance of the Spirit they pursued a line of study and action that brought them into the light and power of vital godliness.

They had been baptized in infancy, confirmed in youth, and were then in good standing in the Established Church, and some of them had even been set apart for the gospel ministry; but all this, while proper and becoming, did not satisfy their longings—did not give to them the peace that passeth all understanding.

Therefore, discovering in each other oneness of purpose, they banded themselves together in order

to seek each for himself, and to help others attain the highest New Testament standard of experience and life.

In seeking to attain this end, they were led to live very economically in order that they might reserve out of their meager support funds with which to succor the indigent and the afflicted.

This league developed in them a methodical life. Every hour, every moment was an opportunity for improving oneself or for doing good to others, so they sought to be never unemployed, never triflingly employed.

This manner of living soon brought upon them the scorn and

jeering of their fellow-students, who, in the vanity of their hearts, saw in the league only that which excited their contempt. They applied to these methodical and serious young men the opprobrious epithet "Methodists," which, borne by them as a mark of reproach, became in after years the synonym for applied Christianity set on fire by the Holy Spirit.

Those thus banded together did not set themselves up to be holier and better than other people, for they began, according to John Wesley, by finding fault with themselves, and with that self-censure as a basis, they made daily searching into the life of the great Exemplar

in order that they might assimilate more closely his matchless character. They were preëminently students of the Scriptures, but did not omit the reading of other helpful literature, such as the biographies of great and holy men, and the literary product of consecrated intellect.


Notice how the purposes and aims of the first young people's band coincide with the object sought to be obtained by this great work in which you are now engaged. First, the careful study of the Bible for individual and mutual profit, and prayer for and with one another. Secondly, the effort to conform their lives to the requirements of the gospel. Thirdly, the ministering to the

wants of others, both to the needy poor and to the spiritually destitute. And lastly, the reading of such literature as tended to build up strength and Christian manhood.

But, dear friends, do not conclude that we have here disclosed the foundation stones of the Epworth League, for the true and unshaken foundation which was laid by Christ himself was not fully traced and built upon until after the Wesleys had penetrated to and applied to themselves the deep spiritual teaching of Jesus. Therefore we shall be led to consider, in the next chapter, that wonderful movement called Methodism.

IV.

METHODISM: ENGLAND'S NEED OF IT.

T the beginning of the second quarter of the eighteenth century we found the Holy Club formed at Oxford, the center of English learning.

We will, therefore, from that point of view examine for a while the condition of the people in order to better understand the work of Methodism. We find the Establishment with costly churches, with learned prelates, but with empty pews. The reading of Scripture lessons, the ritual, and prayers, and the preaching of sermons were conducted and delivered

by men set apart to that office and work. There was not a lack of clergymen, nor was there a dearth of learning or of eloquence in the pulpit. It could not be charged truthfully that all the ministers were ungodly men, for among them were many excellent Christian characters. But it is a fact that they read service to comparatively empty pews, and great sermons were delivered to very few hearers, while the masses of the people were almost totally without the gospel. There was a great distance between the pulpit and the people: so much so that while the Sunday service was being conducted in the temples of worship the people were giving themselves over to un-

bridled licentiousness, and were degraded in habit and vicious in conduct, heeding not the call of the church bells and regarding not the laws of God. This was peculiarly the condition of the laboring class. The middle class of Englishmen were less depraved, and formed the moral element of the kingdom. The upper class and the nobility were given to more refined but equally vicious habits and sinful pleasures. Adding to their irreligious manner of life another destructive element, they drifted away into deism, skepticism, and infidelity. Now when this became alarmingly manifest, the learned bishops and clergymen devoted their best thought and energy to contend-

ing against the inroads of deistic and infidel influences. About that time Butler wrote his great "Analogy." The prelates wrote learned treatises in defense of the Christian religion, preached orthodoxy from the pulpits, and earnestly contended against the popular phases of unbelief; but it was the intellectual Christianity they advocated, it was merely intellectual unbelief they combated. The form of godliness was there, but its spiritual power was conspicuously absent. Butler and his fellow-combatants in the struggle against deism won a great victory for intellectual faith in the Christian religion, but brought to bear no restraint upon the vice and degeneracy of the peo-

ple; so that the condition of the wealthy, the educated, and the nobility was deplorable enough, even after the influences of deism and skepticism had been greatly weakened, because they were left without the blessings of a gospel of peace and power. But the mass of the people, the working class in the collieries and shops, untouched by the intellectual force of Christianity and unrestrained by the preaching and exemplifying of a holy life, followed the depraved tendency of their fallen nature, and thus gave themselves up to vice in its worst form.

The clergy of the Church of England were equal to the task of repelling the invading forces of de-

ism; but, though many of them no doubt deplored the degeneracy and wickedness of the people, they stood paralyzed before the tide of iniquity that was flooding the nation. They were trained to combat an intellectual foe, but had not learned the art of fighting against sin.

Logic will do to thrust at a mental disquiet, but it takes the power of the Holy Spirit in the preacher to strike down sin. This the clergy did not have; and so, unless help had come from another source, all their triumph over heterodoxy had been fruitless.

This state of religious affairs in England, and its consequent influence upon both the highest and the lowest

elements of society, called loudly for help. There was a great need of the Holy Spirit's coming into the hearts of the ministers that his power might be bestowed upon the people. While the clergy were standing helpless before this appalling need, those young men of the Oxford Club had found God and had been anointed of the Holy Ghost to organize a force for England's regeneration.

V.

METHODISM: HOW IT BROUGHT HELP.

WE concluded the previous chapter with England in great need of some power to save the people from sin and to turn them unto peaceable and holy lives. We saw that the clergy of the Established Church, if they desired to do so, utterly failed to accomplish this end. Let us advance a few years and then stop and take a look at these same people whom we last beheld a mass of corruption and iniquity. Behold what a marvelous change has taken place! We saw before great churches without worshipers, while

near by the people desecrated the holy day. Now what do we see? There is a vast congregation, numbering from ten to twenty thousand souls, gathered around a stand in one of the English commons. They have come to hear the gospel preached by a Methodist preacher, and as he proclaims the power of Christ to save from sin the people are melted to tears, and as he declares God's denunciation of sin the people tremble and cry aloud for mercy. Not only the poor and the lowly in the ranks of life are found here, but among them, rejoicing in conscious salvation or weeping over their profligacy, are seen some of the rich and noble of the realm. Is not it a wonderful

change we now observe in a few years wrought in the lives of the people? The proud and arrogant are humbled and become fellow sufferers and workers in the kingdom and patience of our Lord Jesus Christ. Observe the laborers in the shops and the collieries. Profanity has given place to the songs of Zion, ribaldry to hallelujahs, fighting to brotherly love, and hatred to peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. Now this reformation of human lives was the supreme need of England, and Methodism was used by the gracious Lord as the instrument under the influence of the Spirit for its accomplishment. This is the way it was brought about. John

and Charles Wesley, together with the other members of that band of Oxford students, continued to seek for the truth after they left the university. Whether in England or in Georgia among the early settlers of Savannah, the Wesleys desisted not from an earnest longing after spiritual life — sonship in the gospel. John Wesley afterward wrote a sermon in which he drew the distinction between sons and servants of God. He sought to be admitted into the family of God by adoption.

After John and Charles had been preaching for several years, they both came into the clear experience of regeneration by the power of God, and received the witness of the Spir-

it testifying to their adoption into the heavenly family, and were endued with power from on high after that the Holy Spirit had descended upon them.

The gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, but the vehicle of that gospel must himself be a living example of its wonderful power in order for its influence to move the multitudes. The apostles themselves were not prepared to carry salvation to the people until they had felt in themselves the power of the Holy Spirit. So John and Charles Wesley and the Methodists not only learned the doctrines of the New Testament, but they became the vehicles of the heavenly power, and

carried to the people not only sound doctrines, but also the power and the demonstration of the Holy Ghost. And the plain story of the cross and the doctrines of salvation from the lips and lives of those men drew to them the flocking thousands of hungry souls. Thus the preaching of spiritual religion by men who had experienced its power in their own lives brought to England the help so much needed.

It is now necessary for us to advance to one more point of consideration before we reach the foundation upon which it is desired to rest the walls of this new and massive building. Let us then in another chapter trace out the foundation stones.

VI.

THE FOUNDATION STONES.

THE conversion of the Wesleys was a clear and powerful work of God in the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost. With their conversion Methodism as a mighty spiritual force began its mission in the world. Now from that beginning point until the present day Methodism has been uniform in its doctrines and aim. What are the distinguishing doctrines of Methodism, the preaching and exemplifying of which brought redemption to England? Are they not

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these two: Regeneration and the witness of the Spirit? Martin Luther had as the fundamental teaching in his great religious upheaval the doctrine of justification by faith, and this was plainly and forcibly declared to the people by the Methodists, but the doctrinal basis upon which Methodism rests may be safely put down as regeneration and the witness of the Spirit.

What wrought the gracious change in the condition of the masses of England? It was the Holy Spirit's power making them new creatures in Christ Jesus. No refining and elevating influence is sufficient to permanently change a vicious community into one of peace and sobri-

ety, unless it possesses the authority and power of making men new creatures.

Regeneration is "the divine act which imparts to the penitent believer the new and higher life in personal union with Christ." Methodism brought forward that essential doctrine, not new, but forgotten, and in the preaching of it men were influenced to turn from sin and to seek with all their hearts the crucified Saviour, who in manifesting himself to them as the Life, changed them, through the operation of the Holy Ghost, from the power and dominion of sin unto holiness of life and heart. Seeking to lead a new life, joining the Church, attending upon its ordinan-

ces, and doing deeds of charity are good in their place, but they should never be allowed by you to be a substitute in your lives for that essential work of the Holy Ghost in regeneration of which Jesus said: "Ye must be born again." Now this doctrine is one stratum of the foundation upon which you should build the walls of the Epworth League.

The other doctrine, that of the witness of the Spirit, has been peculiarly characteristic of Methodist preaching. It involves a consciousness of membership in the heavenly family. It is the Spirit's testimony to our spirits that we are children of God. This, like the other doctrine, is of God and not of man, and is

very full of comfort and cheer. The Holy Spirit bearing witness with mine that I am a child of God! That fills the heart full of gladness and makes a happy Christian. How dark is the denial of this! That one may not know his sins forgiven and may not know his name inscribed in heaven dooms him to a joyless service. But the blessed Spirit's witness inspires to loving and joyful obedience. It is a hopeful doctrine even to those in the Church who have not been regenerated; for if they, like John and Charles Wesley, will seek the Lord with their whole hearts, they shall find him, be touched by the regenerating power, and receive the Spirit's witness to their salvation.

This doctrine is the second stratum of the foundation which underlies and supports all the structure of Methodism and which must be built upon by the Epworth League if we would make it the building God intends it to be.

The aim of Methodism is twofold. When a sinner has been born from above, then only is he able to lead a new and consecrated life of service to Christ and his Church. So Methodism seeks to build up in the individual life which has been renewed unto a spiritual relation with Christ the character conformed to the laws of God. A Methodist, according to the definition given by John Wesley in his dictionary, is one who

lives according to the principles of the New Testament. It involves, therefore, the consecration of individual life to the Saviour manifested in a willing conformity to his law as laid down in the New Testament, and enforced upon our consciences by the Holy Spirit. A regenerated person may be a very poor Methodist by not seeking to order his life after the precepts of Christ. So that Methodism seeks the full consecration of individual lives in loving obedience to all the requirements of the gospel.

The blessed Saviour called for this consecration, and the apostles in their letters to Christians urged the sanctification, or setting apart, of all the

powers of mind and heart to loving and serving God.

And, dear reader, this is a fundamental principle in Methodism. It involves a prayerful, persistent, and trustful effort on the part of each Christian to bring every thought, act, word, imagination, and aspiration into complete subjection to Christ. Now this forms the third stratum that in uniform strength and beauty is laid by the divine hand completely around the foundation of our new building.

The other aim that is fundamental to Methodism is involved in the great commission: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." It is to develop in

the people called Methodists a yearning for the salvation of souls, and the bestowing of the individual energy, prayer, time, and means to the conversion of sinners, at home and in the farthest regions of the earth. It is the principle of Missions, Domestic and Foreign. It was manifest in Wesley, who said, "The world is my parish;" and glowed in the heart of Bishop Coke, who traversed the seas in seeking to carry the gospel of peace to the heathen. It was fanned into a flame of enthusiasm by our fathers of American Methodism who traveled through the forests infested with hostile Indians in order to tell to the settlers of this new world the story of the crucifixion; to preach the for-

givenness of sins, the new life in Christ, and the witness of the Spirit, and to encourage to a holy life those who had accepted the Saviour. This forms the fourth stratum of the foundation.

Now, my dear fellow-laborers, here is disclosed what we deem the foundation upon which our new structure must rest. It is the foundation laid by the Lord and built upon by Methodism. This new building is to be for God; then we must build on the rock foundation of God. It is to be after the plan of Methodist architecture, then let it have a Methodist foundation. John, in the Apocalypse, was permitted to see the New Jerusalem, and discovered twelve foundations. In observing Metho-

dism we have found these four: the doctrines of regeneration and of the witness of the Spirit, the aims, a life of willing obedience, and the salvation of every creature. Now these four goodly stones lie all around the plan of building. You may know that if you are erecting the wall upon a foundation that does not contain all four of these, you are building unwisely and should seek for the true foundation and build upon it. O my young friends, what a structure your strong young hands can raise if you build upon this foundation!

Be sure that the doctrine of regeneration is there. Be sure that the doctrine of the witness of the Spirit

is there. Be sure that personal obedience to Christ is firmly fixed there. Be sure that a zeal for the salvation of others is not wanting. If we build upon this foundation, the holy shekinah shall overshadow the building, the Holy Spirit shall dwell within it, and the floods shall not destroy it, for it is built upon a rock.

Now, before we take up the material being worked into this new edifice of the Church, it is our desire to call your attention to how Methodism has always adjusted itself to the demands of the time and what means it has heretofore used in accomplishing the wonderful results in the salvation of men.

VII.

THE USE OF MEANS.

METHODISM had a peculiar origin in that it became an autonomy not of Mr. Wesley's will, but of the will of God. It is characterized in like manner concerning the means used for the propagation of the doctrines and the accomplishment of the aims of the Church. Providence has presented these means of grace and instruction; and Methodism, discerning the hand of God, has always accepted and made good use of them. Take field preaching as a means of carrying the gospel to the multitude. Mr.

Wesley did not deliberately select that method of preaching, but by circumstances was forced to go into the fields in order to preach spiritual religion. He soon discovered by the presence and blessing of the Holy Spirit that it was of God's direction. It proved to be exactly what the people needed, and was an important factor in the salvation of that class who had been almost lost to spiritual influence.

Then look at lay preaching. By this is meant the preaching of the gospel by unordained and sometimes by unlearned men. Wesley did not consider the need of the time, and inaugurate a system of lay preaching to meet it. On the contrary, it re-

quired a little while for him, and especially for his brother Charles, to become adjusted to it. God led them into this method of meeting an emergency in the work. The blessing of God upon the lay workers won both the brothers to a hearty acceptance and use of them in Methodism.

Class meeting originated in the great need of spiritual oversight and the rapid increase of converts. The number of people brought under the care of the preachers increased more rapidly than the preachers. So it became necessary to divide the membership into classes, and to appoint for each a leader who should take spiritual oversight and assist

them in developing holy lives. Class meeting became a great means of grace.

The new life in Methodism found not the hymns with which to sing their prayers and rejoicings to God.

Another divine indication was there, and Charles Wesley became the bard of spiritual song. Excellent use was made of this means of grace.

Religious instruction pressed upon them, and the need of literature and education led to the founding of schools and to the writing of books. When God opened this way for doing good, they entered it heartily.

We might go on tracing out the lines of God's providence in leading

the Methodists into the use of the means of his ordaining, and might continue to call attention to the happy results that followed; but enough has been written to make clear the fact that the means for the accomplishment of Methodism's mission in the world have usually grown out of the development of the work and the needs of the hour, rather than from men's theories of work.

It now transpires that the need of the time and the call of God appeals to the young men and young women of the Church. A thoughtful look at the development and working of the young people's movement will, we believe, convince one that God is in it. The Epworth League has

come to us almost without our bidding, and as a means for the accomplishing of gracious results has been presented to our hands by the same Providence that has hitherto watched over the destiny of Methodism, and springs out of a deep need of this day. The imminent danger now to you young people arises from the fact that such overwhelming influences are being brought to bear upon you to win your affection from Christ and fix it upon the world. Many young people in the Church succumb to this influence and become so in love with worldly things and so infatuated with sinful pleasures, that the love of Christ is banished from their hearts.

God, therefore, prompts you through the Holy Spirit, to band yourselves together as a counteracting force in the Church, and if you carry forward the work after the manner of your beginning, it will not be very long until the Epworth League shall form a mighty army of brave and consecrated young lives ready to dare and to do for the blessed Master.

May this League become, through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, the means that shall build our young people up in the faith and experience of the gospel! So that ere long the daughters of Methodism shall "be as corner stones polished after the similitude of a pal-

ace," and the sons of Methodism may be addressed in the language of the beloved apostle who wrote the young men of the early Church: "I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one."

VIII.

THE DEMAND FOR THE LEAGUE.

IT will be readily admitted by most people now that the Epworth League may be made to serve a good purpose in the Church. That much, however, may be readily admitted by persons who see no need of the League, and who do not regard it of any great importance. This chapter will be devoted to the consideration of it not merely as a means of possible good, but as a response to a demand in the Church. It is to answer a question which springs up in the heart of many a pastor—namely, How shall we save

the young people from the worldly and harmful influences now seducing so many from the path of obedience, and secure for the Church their cheerful service, so that the vigor and buoyancy of youth shall be given to the cause of Christ?

In the cities and towns the allurements of gilded sin and the enticements of social vice lead many promising young Church members into habits which eventually insulate them from sympathy and fellowship with their Church, and stifle all zeal for the Master's cause. How saddening to the pastor's heart to see a young man whom he has received into the Church begin to show signs of indifference! Irregularity

at church and Sunday school is followed by taking a seat near the door, then by a failure to take the sacrament of the Lord's Supper; and thus he loses his hold on the Church as the world tightens its coils around him, until he reaches the state of a complete worldling and yet is considered a member of the Church. The pastor may have tried, but failed to bring him back to Christ. The Church, in our towns and cities especially, has been losing heavily just along that line, as every pastor of such churches can testify. In such cases the Church suffers doubly. It suffers in the loss of his consecrated service in Christian work, and in having to bear the burden of not

only his inactivity, but also the heavier burden of his increasing worldliness. We dare say that few pastors have not felt the need of help right here, of something that shall bind the young people more closely to the Church, and constrain them to yield a happy and loyal obedience to Christ.

The Sunday school, approved of men and blessed of the Lord, fails to meet this demand. The prayer meeting and the preaching of the gospel do not reach the case. Pastoral visitation and instruction, whatever they ought to accomplish, do not remedy the evil. Now all this is founded on reason. It is a fact that people, young and old alike, are

largely influenced to a course of conduct or a manner of life by the force of a prevailing sentiment.

This is not an opprobrious averment, but a simple statement of fact. The preacher from the pulpit on Sunday declares truth, and lovingly warns against error, and good impressions are made; but during the week following, the associations and influences at work, in which there is the magnetism of social contact, drive from the minds of some who most needed to heed them the good impressions made at church.

And in the preacher's mingling with the people he can at most be with any one person a very short time, while the associations that al-

lure away from Christ are at work almost constantly. Besides, the pastor, in meeting every one when he or she is on good behavior, fails to find out the weaknesses of many who really need his assistance.

This is an age of social influence. One must be wise enough to detect good or evil influence in the social atmosphere, or else be subject to loss of character before the real force at work in breaking one down has been discovered.

Now behold the demand for this young people's society builded upon the foundation pointed out.

When the young people of a Church are without an active sentiment for the right, and without an

expressed opinion that leads to concert of action, they may individually maintain their Christian integrity, but young Christians from other portions of the country who come into their midst will be very liable to be more influenced by the active force of worldly society than by the inactive Church sentiment. Now the demand is for something that shall bring together the young people of the Church and create among them a community of purpose, that out of it may spring an active and prevailing sentiment in favor of right living and loyal service to Christ. What is known as fashionable and worldly society projects its influence so forcibly upon a town for the rea-

son that it keeps up the magnetic power of gatherings and is really an organized force. Now the Epworth League is adapted to meet this very want. It will bind the sincerely Christian young people together, and will quicken into activity a right sentiment which as a leaven will begin to permeate society.

The League members will not only have a good influence in the Church, but as members of the social life of the community, by declining to go into sin, and by a cheerful conformity to the laws of God, they will strike at the root of the evil, and by demonstrating the fact that individual or social happiness is not augmented by sinful indulgence

they will carry the gospel in its most convincing form where it is greatly needed and where the minister cannot take it: into the heart of society. So that this young people's movement is not simply to entertain and engage the young members of the Church in order to shield them from the enticements of sin, but has the more robust and virile aim of using them to be evangelists of grace to the irreligious in society.

If you will allow a military figure introduced here, the campaign of love and salvation is now planned for an invasion of the enemy's stronghold. The demand upon us is for vigorous and happy young soldiers. The call for an army to make

this invasion is to you young people of the Church. Many of you have been in quarters ever since you enrolled. Some have never been in a fight, and know nothing of the joy that comes to the victorious soldier of the cross. The Epworth League is intended to give you a good drilling and send you to the front. Therefore as good soldiers of Jesus Christ, put on the whole armor of God, the breastplate of righteousness, the helmet of salvation, the girdle of truth, the greaves of gospel preparation, the shield of faith, and, clasping the sword of the Spirit, take your place in the conquering host of King Immanuel.

The Crusaders, after vain efforts

to take Palestine from the infidel, concluded that nothing but the innocence of children could rescue the holy sepulcher, so a vast army of little ones began the march from Europe toward the holy city.

Theirs was a mistaken zeal that sought temporal things for the kingdom of Christ, and it all ended in disaster. But ours is a crusade against sin and for human salvation and happiness, and will carry not the weapon of carnal warfare, but the more powerful one of love. In it we feel sure that we have the mind of Christ because it is the undertaking of what we know to be his will—that is, the salvation of people and the consecration of lives to the serv-

ice of God. You young people of the Church have come to the kingdom for such a time as this, and will no doubt measure up to the responsibility and demand of the time.

Now then, dear friends, let us look at the plan of the building which those in authority have constructed for us.

IX.

THE PLAN OF THE BUILDING.

IF we rightly read Church history, God has placed his approval upon denominationalism. Sectarian bigotry can only be displeasing to him, but since denominational Christendom of the past few centuries has received more signally God's favor than had the unified Christendom of the past thousand years, it is evidence that the Divine Mind regards not with displeasure the branches into which his Church is divided.

A denominational spirit is not inconsistent with true Christian love, need not have in it anything un-

christlike, but by massing all who interpret alike the Scriptures into a congenial body—into an harmonious community, increases geometrically their power for good as their number increases arithmetically. The Methodists have peculiar methods and doctrines which they find that God has approved in the winning of millions of souls and in the marvelous building up of Christ's kingdom among men. And if we believe that our Church has those tenets of faith and that system of government suited to the accomplishment of the great results aimed at, then we wish to perform our life work under the influence of, in sympathy with, and in loyal obedience to Methodism.

A military campaign may be carried on with infantry, cavalry, artillery, and a navy. These all under one government work together for defense or for conquest, yet they are distinct and separate in discipline, tactics, and method of fighting. An effort to secure a book of tactics by which all these separate divisions of a nation's military force are to be directed in the drill, would be an attempt to accomplish the impossible.

So, while the evangelical Churches form one grand spiritual army against sin, yet each has its distinct and appropriate methods of drilling for the conflict. They are coördinate and distinct, and yet they are fighting under the same banner, that of

Christ, and all seeking to establish his reign in the lives of men. We therefore recognize the value of denominationalism with reference to Church work.

Now the Epworth League is not to be an auxiliary to the Church, not to be an adjunct, but is to be the Church itself in relation to young manhood and young womanhood. As the missionary operations are not the work of a separate and auxiliary body, but is the Church itself in its effort to save the souls of mankind, so the League is to be regarded as the Methodist Church in its work for and with young people. Now, then, if that be correct, the question of having a denominational organization

answers itself. Is there a need for the Methodist Church to maintain its separate autonomy? Is it right for the Missionary Board to continue to be denominational? Should we have a denominational Sunday school? Ought the Church Extension Board to be subordinate to some interdenominational board? The Church Extension work is Methodism building Methodist churches; the Sunday school is the Methodist Church teaching the children of the Church, and the Epworth League is to be the Methodist Church drilling and equipping the young volunteers for the conquest over sin.

A brigade of cavalry coöperate with and sustain a division of infan-

try, but they are separate in the drill, on the battlefield, and in the camp. We wish to be in touch with and heartily support every other young people's movement, and we should hold ourselves ever ready to coöperate with all their assaults upon the kingdom of unrighteousness; but we want to drill by Methodist tactics, and (dropping back into our general figure) to build a Methodist edifice.

A squadron of war ships cannot maneuver to the beat of a bass drum, but a regiment of infantry need such a measurer of time for the military step. Methodism has always been one of the foremost, if not *the* foremost Church to fraternize with all who love the Lord in sincerity and

are working for his glory; but in all the manifestations of liberality toward Christians of all names denominational integrity has been strongly maintained, and now to loosen the bands of Church fealty would be an unnecessary and perilous act. It would be unnecessary, because while working in your denominational League, you may cultivate happy relationship with all other young peoples' societies. It would be perilous because it would tend to separate you from distinctive Methodist doctrine, and to make you half hearted.

Sound doctrine—and to us Methodist doctrine is that—is as essential to a stalwart Christian manhood as is a vertebral column to a robust body.

We are exhorted to hold fast the form of sound doctrine. Now the doctrines of our Church are just the understanding we have of the Bible—it is the way we read the Scriptures. We believe, therefore, that in our system of doctrines we have the mind of God as given us in revelation. So that it is our duty to follow that line which will lead to the development of doctrinal integrity, and we believe the maintenance of denominational integrity lies along that line.

A loosening of denominational bonds would be perilous because it would tend to diminish love for one's Church. Church pride and Church ambition are to be avoided, but a de-

votion to one's own Church is to be cultivated assiduously. If you cannot love the Church you are a member of—if there is incongeniality, why, then, go where your affections will be elicited. One who loves all Churches alike and has no attachment to one over another, does not love any of them as he ought, and his service to God based on that indifferent attitude toward the Churches is not what it ought to be.


We conclude this chapter, therefore, with the declaration that if denominationalism pervaded by the spirit of Christ and manifesting the greatest of Christian graces, love that never faileth, is the Heaven-approved plan for the advancement of

Christ's kingdom, then a denominational young people's society permeated with love to God and to men, is the proper plan for our new building.

Why should we wish any other plan? Is there a better? Has the architectural plan of Methodism grown obsolete? Is it inadequate? No. The plan is a good one. In fact, to Methodists, it is the best plan ever made, because to them it conforms to "the pattern showed in the mount," and is adjusted to the progress of the ages.

X.

MATERIAL: BIBLE STUDY.

AKE the Bible as a book or as a library of sixty-six volumes, and from whatever view you look at its contents it is incomparably superior to any other work the world has ever known. As a history of the human race, within its professed scope, it transcends all other histories. It lays no claim to being an exhaustive universal history, but gives the records of the nations only as they touch the line of God's providence in redemption. However, with only this incidental record, its annals of the world are of great val-

ue. The main line of Bible history is to trace out the rise, development, and fall of that wonderful nation over whom David and Solomon reigned, and of whom the Messiah was born.

The historical points of scripture have stood the test of the severest scrutiny and criticism. It is very difficult for any one to find a historical inaccuracy; although, were a number of them to be clearly proved, that would not lessen the authority of the Bible.

In Acts xiii. 7 Luke incidentally states that Sergius Paulus was proconsul of the country. It is said that critics for a long time pointed to that as an inaccuracy, basing their

statement upon the supposed fact that Cyprus had no proconsul. But late investigation has revealed, through the coin of that day, that Paulus was indeed a proconsul.

The history of the Hebrew race is a most wonderful record; and if you will read it like you read other books, with an effort to grasp the whole compass of that marvelous epoch, you will find it very interesting reading.

If you like to read poetry, where can you find anything of better sustained poetic imagination than the book of Job? What lyrics are comparable to the Psalms of David and his fellow-composers? Have you ever read the book of Job and

Psalms as you read Tennyson, for the beauty of diction and the exalted thought?

Young people are likely to fall into the mistake, too common, that the Bible has no value as a literary or historical production, and is to be read only from a sense of duty. That is a mistaken notion which you should shun. If in your meetings you should take up the Psalms or Job as a book of poems, and have each member to recite from it a select thought, just as in our schools of learning we are invited to an evening with Longfellow, the beauty of inspired poetry would lend interest to the reading of the Bible.

In Bible study we are to remem-

ber that revelation was progressive from the first declaration and promise, "The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head," till the full manifestation of God in the incarnate Son.

God graciously gave the revelation of himself and of redemption just as man was able to receive and appropriate it, hence we perceive the gradual emerging from the darkness of the fall. The Lord set one star in the darkened firmament that overhung the fallen pair; star after star of promise appeared there until when Abraham walked out to look up he beheld the dark concave bedecked with celestial gems.

Upon Moses and Israel the moon

of ritualism rose and reflected the light which it borrowed from the Sun of Righteousness, the passover lamb with sprinkled blood being the reflection of the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. Isaiah sat upon the prophetic mount in the morning twilight, and with rapture beheld in the east the rosy pencilings of approaching day; then the Sun arose, revealing God in the flesh, and in his light we all rejoice. Revelation necessarily had a period of incompleteness, but at every stage it was perfect.

In the study of God's word we also must take cognizance of the fact that the inspired writers spoke of natural phenomena in terms of

men's understanding of them. In the book of Joshua the sun and moon are said to stand still. We now speak of the sun's apparent motion, and of the moon's real journey around the earth, but to the ancients both sun and moon had a real motion around the earth as a center. It would be taken by all as a base interpolation if there should be found a manuscript of the book of Joshua in which the astronomical accuracy of the nineteenth century of our Lord appeared in the description of the miracle wrought in favor of the valiant leader of Israel.

In the study of the Bible you must discriminate between what the Bible really says and what men's

opinions make it say. The writer once read an article on the discovered mummy of the Pharoah of the oppression. When relating the fact to a class of young men, he was met with the question: "How can that be when the Bible says he was drowned in the Red Sea?" An investigation afterward revealed the fact that the Bible does not say that the Pharoah of the Exodus was drowned.

Many difficulties arise in our minds from the fact that we read, but do not heed what is actually written. Sometimes we get our ideas of scripture from a picture we have seen, and not from the Bible narrative. We do not read Ovid that way, nor Cicero nor astronomy nor chemistry.

But you are to study the Bible in order to learn the revealed will of your Heavenly Father concerning your life here and your destiny for the future. Read it as the manifestation of divine love, read it as the expression of tender compassion from Him who "so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." As you thus read, trust the promises and keep the commandments. Put Bible study in our new building.

XI.

MATERIAL: WORKS OF CHARITY AND HELP.

WHEN people join the Church, they ought to have something to do, some way in which they may employ heart and hand for the Master. The more nearly, therefore, you can utilize the entire body of young people of the Church, the more good you will accomplish for them. Good works, we maintain, are the fruit of faith and are pleasing and acceptable to God as an evidence of faith in Christ and of love for him. Jesus told his disciples and the people that the judgment will be based upon what we

have done for him, and that what we have done for him will be measured by what we have done for our fellow-men for his sake. So that a life of faith in Christ will be manifested by a life of Christian activity, in charity and help. If faith in Christ that brings forgiveness of sins and regeneration be not fruitful of good works, it will die, for we are told by the apostle James that faith without works is dead. So you should see that this important material is used. The Epworth League should become the channel through which every young convert and every young man or young lady who comes into the Church by certificate from any other community will readily and freely

expend their energy in cheerful service to the Master. It is very essential to successful Christian work that the time of beginning to serve be not deferred until the buoyancy of young life has disappeared, for people rarely become active workers in the Church in middle life or in old age after they have spent their youth and young manhood in Church membership characterized by religious idleness. In the business world, habits of industry or of idleness acquired in youth generally persist to the close of life, so that a young man practically fixes his destiny in business relations by the habits he forms in youth. This law holds good with reference to the development of moral and spiritual life.


The Epworth League, therefore, will prove to be of inestimable benefit to Methodism if it seizes upon the young and vigorous life just coming into Church membership, and directs it at once to some line of service to Christ that tends to develop the habit of good works from a sense of love to the Saviour. We are creatures of habit. When once a good or a bad habit fixes itself in our lives, it sets up an equal claim with nature; and, as a rule, people by their actions acknowledge the validity of the claim. Since, therefore, we are creatures of habit, it is wise to seek the development of good habits. As the habit of doing good and working for Christ is acquired

upon the right basis, the individual grows more and more in the experience of a happy life. A working Christian is a joyful person, but an indolent Church member is not happy and cannot be because he is daily losing ground. How can that person take pleasure in God or in Church work whose time and thought are engrossed with the things of the world to the exclusion of prayer and the study of God's word? He does not attend Sunday school; gives no help to the poor; takes no interest in the prayer meeting. The Epworth League should take away much of that kind of trouble in the Church by winning people into serving the Master and doing something

for his cause. Love prompts one to do something for the person loved, and the performing of a deed from such motives strengthens that love. Jesus seemed to lay stress upon that fact in human lives when he three times asked Peter if he loved him and three times replied to the apostle's asseveration of love with a call to do something for him: "Feed my sheep." The Epworth League may ask the young Christian, "Do you love Christ?" and add, "If you do, then come with us and help us show our love by the work of charity and help which we shall perform for the poor and needy as unto him."

XII.

MATERIAL: METHODIST LITERATURE.

HE founder of Methodism was a strong and voluminous writer, and early in the history of the Methodist movement began to circulate literature in keeping with the doctrines he taught. He wisely chose books and pamphlets as effective weapons in his aggressive war against sin. Following the example of its great founder, Methodism has made a record in the distribution of religious literature. In the early days of the itinerancy, and, indeed, up to the last generation of preachers, in his round of circuit

preaching the pastor carried with him in his *vade mecum*, the indispensable saddlebags, a supply of books, such as he thought suited to the needs of the people, and thus at every church and every home into which he entered he brought the people into contact with Methodist literature. He then had the field and was the recognized dispenser of religious books.

People looked forward to his coming on his regular monthly round as to an opportunity for purchasing the books needed by their families. The preacher, being thus related to the people with regard to their reading, had a most excellent opportunity for encouraging them to thoroughly in-

form themselves concerning the history, the doctrines and the work of Methodism. The conditions of itinerancy and the relation of pastor and people have so materially changed that the Methodist preacher cannot be the factor in the reading habits of his people that his predecessor was, but with the change of conditions the need for the reading of Methodist literature by Methodists and the study of Methodist polity by Methodists has been augmented rather than decreased. In this day the people come in contact with the varied and cheap literature, much of which is good, more of it evil. While you ride on the railway trains, there is brought to you by the newsboy, at

frequent intervals, a lot of such books, usually of the latter class. The young people especially find it so easy to drop into the bad habit of reading only that which is light and frivolous. And the more of such works they read, the less taste they have for the more substantial kind of reading. It works disaster to intellect and piety to be thrust out into the current of this light literature, which varies in its depth from the merely unprofitable to the positively vicious, when one has not previously been well trained in the mental athletics of sound reading; for, untrained to stem the current, one is usually swept down the stream and loses that vigor and purity of mind essen-

tial to true manhood. The cry is sometimes heard that the good literature is stale and heavy while the other is bright and attractive, and that is why the light literature of the day has the ascendancy over that of the Church in the minds of some young people. But such an hypothesis is not necessary to the solution of the matter. Some young people are very fond of fancy candies and dainties, and eat so frequently of them that they have no appetite for substantial food. The trouble is located in their depraved and abnormal taste, the gratifying of which leads to disease. So it is in the matter of which we are writing. Some people give themselves mental dyspepsia

by their habits of reading and thinking, and the natural result is a disinclination to what is solid and substantial.

As material to be wrought into this great building, you should seek to arouse a deep interest in the minds of all our young people in the study of Methodist history, biography, doctrines, and government.

We do not wish to be understood as advocating the reading of our Church literature to the exclusion of all other. Not at all. We do not partake of the Moslem general's mind who ordered the burning of the Alexandrian library, and gave as his reason for it that if the books in it contained what was in the Ko-

ran they were not needed, and if they contained what was not in the Koran they were false, and hence destruction was inevitable. We are sorry he had that great collection of books and manuscripts burned, for we want every worthy book in the world to be printed and read.

There are books of history, poetry, science, philosophy, and even works of fiction that are to be read. There are a number of works of fiction, the tone and morals, the diction and sentiment, of which help to build one up in nobility of character. But in the reading of fiction you need to be very prudent and judicious. With this wide field of reading before them, young Methodists are liable to overlook

the very important literature of their Church, for the reason that it is not so conspicuously handy as the other. For in their homes books of poems, secular histories, works of fiction and of science are usually found in the library, and their teachers at college and school call their attention to this and that fact in history, a sentiment in poetry, a character in fiction, or a discovery in science, so they are led to give these a perusal when under other circumstances they would not. And very few home libraries contain a history of Methodism, biographies of Methodist heroes and heroines or the books written by Methodist intellects. Their daily studies and recitations bring

to remembrance more frequently the heroes of the "Iliad" and "Odyssey" than of the Lutheran or Wesleyan reformation. This is not an outburst of pessimism, but a statement of your early environments. This state of things makes it difficult to work up a lively interest in our literature, but the difficulty of arousing an interest is a very strong evidence that it is an important matter.

It shows that we need to cultivate a habit of reading along this line. Many of us are ignorant of what literature Methodism has produced. We need to be brought into communion with our heroes of the past, and in touch with the master spirits of the Methodism of to-day. A citi-

zen is more intelligently loyal and patriotic by being informed concerning the history and achievements of his nation. So it is with the Church. We expect the best service from those who enter with most intelligent enthusiasm into the work. A young lawyer who had been reared under the influence of his father considered himself a Whig until, after being nominated for an office as a Whig, he gave diligent study to the two parties, and then declined the nomination because he was a Democrat.

This fact is here used only as an illustration. We all need to know why we are Methodists. We need to be able to give a reason for our

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adherence to the Church other than that our parents belonged to it. Children should join the Church of their parents; but young Methodists should love their Church because they know her doctrines, history, and polity.

Now, the literature of our common Methodism is neither scant nor mediocre. It will compare favorably with any other Church literature of the world, and does not lose by comparison with the products of the foremost intellects in the world of letters. Our own Church is not without a creditable literature. The indication now is that the Southland, and our Church with it, borders on an era of splendid literary achievement.

So that young people who desire to devote a portion of their reading to Methodist literature will soon discover that there is, and will continue to be, an abundance of excellent reading matter.

Therefore, if you use freely this material in the Epworth League building, and shall succeed in thus establishing the young people in the doctrines and history of Methodism, making intelligent Christians and Methodists of them, you will have accomplished a great work for the Church.

XIII.

MATERIAL: SOCIAL ENJOYMENT.

IN the days of the "Holy Club" at Oxford, and of the early Methodists in Europe and America, such things as social enjoyments and amusements could not have been mentioned to them with their approval.

But the condition and surroundings of the Church of to-day are so changed that, with the same aim of spreading scriptural holiness over these lands, social enjoyment and even amusements of a proper character are not incompatible with the conception of a spiritual and holy

life. Recreation of the proper sort and in due bounds is not only not a waste of time, but is a positive promoter of intellectual and spiritual vigor.

“A merry heart doeth good like a medicine,” said the speaker of wise proverbs. And it is true that the cultivating of a cheerful mind gives strength to the efforts of life. God gave us the faculty of laughter, and created us to desire and to enjoy social and happy relations with others. In following wisely and prudently the social instinct we are in the line of the best and highest development. The harmful amusements and the hurtful social enjoyments are the perversions of what is good and

helpful. And in writing this there is no slur cast upon the memory of the noble heroes of early Methodism who felt called to look to the serious side of life, and to live daily with solemn reference to the judgment.

Their environment was such that the natural course to be taken by honest and earnest men and women would be to eschew social pleasure and to cultivate seriousness. They, no doubt, did the wisest thing, and what brought forth the best results; but now the requisition upon us is that we shall present to the world the demonstration that a consecrated and deeply pious person has the best right to wear a bright face and to be socially attractive.

What more winning and captivating could there be than a cultured young lady, beautiful in form and face, fascinating in manner, brilliant in conversation, who carries into all her social relations the brightness of her happy life, and yet the periphery of whose acts and conversation is the will of Jesus her Lord, and who bravely and unhesitatingly declines to transgress the laws of God or to indulge in what is of doubtful propriety?

Now the Epworth League is organized with recognition of the spirit of laughter which the omniscient Creator gave to us all, and with the intention of leading out on lines of social enjoyment and of allowing

amusements consistent with fidelity to Christ.

But that League which forms itself and gathers in members on the social feature, to the subordination of personal righteousness and faithful work for Christ, makes a dismal failure, and can retrieve the mistake only by going back to the beginning and taking a new start.

Let all who have looked favorably upon the Epworth League only as an avenue for the seeking of social enjoyment stop and think over the matter. If you ever had such an idea, it was grossly wrong. Let them call to mind the purpose of Methodism in the world, and be admonished that every means made

use of must bear upon it the stamp of fidelity and obedience to Christ.

Now, after the League has been organized upon the fundamental principles of Methodism, and the members recognize these principles, we may seek to make use of the social feature as a wise but subordinate means for developing and encouraging the happy social side of a Christian's life. This part of the League must be wisely managed, so that its proper subordination shall always be preserved. It must be kept before the minds of all that we are first to seek the kingdom of Christ and his righteousness, then these things follow in their appropriate order.

Lord Macaulay, one of England's

great historians, said that the Puritans disliked bear baiting not because it hurt the bear, but because the people enjoyed it. In this sarcasm there is food for thought. It is what you enjoy that declares to you and to the world your real character. Whatever protestations to the contrary you may make, what gives you enjoyment indexes your soul.

If vulgar and obscene conversation and anecdotes give you pleasure, you at heart are vulgar; if worldly and sinful pleasures are most attractive to you, you need to get your heart right. The enjoyment of brutal sports, if not the indication of a brutal nature, will de-

velop it if persisted in. The Cæsars feasted their soldiers upon the brutalities and cruelties of the arena, where thousands of men were butchered to make a Roman holiday. A cruel and brutal disposition suited the fierce wars of that age, and their enjoyments fostered that character.

If you intelligently love with all your heart the Lord Jesus, you cannot habitually get enjoyment out of what grieves him. If you are a child of God, having been re-created in the image of Christ, and preserve your Christian integrity, your pleasures, social and individual, will, of necessity, be consonant with that state of heart and life.

“Rejoice in the Lord” means not only to be happy in communion with God, but in all your merry-making, in all your laughter let everything be based on your love to Christ.

There has been vaguely floating about in the minds of young people the thought that if you want to be happy and merry-hearted you must step outside the circle of religion and enter the enchanted grounds of the worldlings. But that is a wholly mistaken idea. The Christian young lady or young man has a perfect right to be vivacious within the radius of his Church relations. You do not have to enter places of worldly amuse-

ments in order to laugh heartily. Be happy in the Lord; be happy because you are a child of God; be happy in all things consistent with the relation you sustain to Christ. Happiness of that sort is unalloyed, but the cup of pleasure one drinks at the sacrifice of fidelity to Jesus has bitterness in it.

Methodist preachers are usually consecrated and self-denying men, given to the one work of saving souls. But who has more social enjoyment or laughs more or tells so many anecdotes? Have these Methodist itinerants discovered, what many failed to find out, that consecrated labor and social enjoyment are joined in the bonds of

matrimony? It seems that they have.

Let us look into the home of a good steward on some country circuit. The circuit rider's horse contentedly eats of the sweet-scented clover hay from the farmer's stable rack, while his master breaks bread with the farmer and his family. Do you hear the peals of laughter that come from the dining room? Do you hear the sound of merry voices? That preacher brought with him a great big beam of sunshine and turned it loose in that household. The little children are happy because the preacher is there; the old grandmother smiles because the preacher has come. Every one

laughs and is filled with gladness. But now the house boy has brought the horse from the stable, and he stands at the gate waiting for his master. The family gather around the fireside, and the preacher reads and comments on one of the beautiful Psalms, and then all kneel in devout prayer. Do you hear him as he holds that family before God in his prayer? He prays for the aged handmaid of the Lord, for the father and mother, and for the dear children, and commends them all to the grace of God. As they rise, the grandmother brushes from her cheek a tear that tells of her emotion, and, before the preacher mounts his horse, the father grasps

his hand heartily and says: "Thank you for your coming, and for your good prayer for me and mine."

That man of God has carried to that home a day of social joy, and left with them a rich spiritual benediction.

Then, my friends, to give social enjoyment its right setting in this great building which you are now erecting is both wise and important. This is good material and is needed, but must be made to add to the beauty of the structure, and not allowed to mar it.

"You hear that boy laughing? you think he's all fun;
But the angels laugh, too, at the good he has done.
The children laugh loud as they troop to his call,
And the poor man that knows him laughs loudest
of all."

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